

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NDJAME 01820 100838Z
ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7060

ACONSUL DOUALA 0595

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PRIS

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

USICA WASHDC

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USICA FOR VOA AND AF

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINS, CD

SUBJECT: GOC REFUSES ENTRY TO US JOURNALISTS

SUMMARY: AT NOON YESTERDAY NEW YORK TIMES
CORRESPONDENT JOHN DARNTON AND NEWSWEEK STAFFER
JAMES PRINGLE ARRIVED AT NDJAMENA AIRPORT ABOARD A CAMEROON
ARILINES 737 JETLINER. FORTY MINUTES LATER, DESPITE PERSONAL
INTERVENTION BY AMBASSADOR, THEY WERE PLACED BACK ON SAME
PLANE FOR RETURN TO YAOUNDE.

1. ON SATURDAY, MAY 6, THE EMBASSY RECEIVED A TELEGRAM FROM
NAIROBI STATING THAT CORRESPONDENTS DARNTON AND PRINGLE
WERE ON THEIR WAY TO NDJAMENA VIA CAMEROON AND WOULD
ARRIVE MAY 7. GIVEN THAT THE GOC HAD JUST REFUSED TO LET
SEVERAL FRENCH JOURNALISTS INTO THE COUNTRY IN REACTION
TO ALARMIST ARTILES IN THE FRENCH PRESS, WHICH THE CHADIANS
CONSIDERED INIMICAL TO THEIR INTENTS, THE EMBASSY
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IMMEDIATELY WENT TO WORK TO SEE IF SUCH A VISIT WERE POSSIBLE.
PAO SCHRAGER CALLED ON SECREATRY OF STATE FOR INFORMATION
OUSMAN TOUADE AND PRESIDENTIAL PRESS ADVISOR GERALDINE
TOUADE, BUT WAS INFORMED THAT NO FINAL DECISION ON
ADMINSSION OF REPORTERS COULD BE MADE UNTIL PRESIDENT
MALLOUM RETURNED FROM LIBREVILLE. TENTATIVELY, THINGS
LOOKED DOUBTFUL AND THE EMBASSY SENT A MESSAGE TO WARN

THE ARRIVING JOURNALISTS OF POSSIBLE PROBLEMS.

2. THE SITUATION REMAINED UNCLEAR THROUGHTOUT THE WEEKEND BUT ON MONDAY MORNING WORD WAS RECEIVED THAT PRESIDENT MALLOUM HAD REITERATED HIS BAN ON ALL WESTERN JOURNALISTS. AMBASSADOR BRADFORD SOUGHT TO INFORM FOREIGN MINISTER KAMOUGUE AND VICE PRESIDENT DJIME OF THE POTENTIAL PITFALLS IN BANNING US JOURNALISTS, BUT WE WERE UNSUCCESSFUL IN GETTING RECONSIDERATION AND OUR CONTACTS WERE LIMITED TO DIRECTOR OF CABINET--DCM LEVEL EXCHANGES(ALTHOUGH WE LATER ASCERTAINED THAT PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT AND FOREIGN MINISTER WERE ALL BRIEFED ON SITUATION).

3. WHEN PRINGLE AND DARNTON ARRIVED AT THE AIRPORT THEY WERE POLITELY BUT FIRMLY INFORMED THAT THEY WOULD HAVE TO RETURN IMMEDIATELY TO YAOUNDE ON THE SAME AIRPLANE. THE AMBASSADOR WAS ALLOWED TO REMAIN WITH THEM DURING THEIR HALF HOUR IN THE TRANSIT AREA, BUT NEITHER JOURNALIST WAS PERMITTED BEYOND THE IMMIGRATION DESK EXCEPT TO IDENTIFY HIS BAGGAGE FOR RETICKETING. REACTION OF PRINGLE AND DARNTON, BOTH EXPERIENCED JOURNALISTS WAS ONE OF RESIGNED ACCEPTANCE.

4. AMBASSADOR HAD SUBSEQUENT LONG CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ON THE MATTER, AND STRESSED THAT GOC WAS MAKING A GRAVE ERROR IN ITS HANDLING OF THE PRESS. HE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNERLINED THAT CHAD HAD A GOOD CASE AND SHOULD BE MAKING IT BEFORE WORLD OPINION RATHER THAN HIDING. FOREIGN MINISTER AGREED ONLY TO RECONSIDER THE QUESTION.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: WE WOULD APPRECIATE NAIROBI, PARIS AND WASHINGTON WARNING ANY CORRESPONDENTS WHO MAY BE PLANNING A TRIP TO CHAD THAT THERE IS A BAN ON VISITS BY JOURNALISTS. ISSUANCE OF A VISA, AS WAS THE CASE WITH PRINGLE AND DARNTON, IS NOT ENOUGH. FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF CABINET KAMIS TOGOI RE-EMPHASIZED TO DCM THAT MORE IMPORTANT FACTOR WAS AUTHORIZATION FOR VISIT FROM MINISTRY OF INFORMATION. WE WILL INFORM POSTS OF ANY CHANGE IN REGULATIONS WHICH WOULD ENABLE VISIT BY LOCALLY BASED CORRESPONDENTS.

COMMENT: PRESIDENTIAL PRESS ADVISOR TOUADE THIS MORNING AGAIN EXPLAINED TO PAO THAT THE BAN WAS NOT ILL-INTENTIONED OR AIMED PARTICULARLY AT US JOURNALISTS. EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE POINT WITH CHADIANS THAT HIDING FROM PRESS IS NO WAY TO ASSURE THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE. BRADFORD

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